

# Robert White

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## Q1

### CANDIDATE INFORMATION

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## Q2

**Yes**

The “36Kx2025” target—the Bowser administration’s goal to add 36,000 new units of housing in the District by 2025—was announced in 2019 and will, presumably, be completed in just a few years. Do you commit to another housing-production goal for 2030?

## Q3

If so, how many additional units of housing do you think should be built in the District by 2030?

As Chair of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government, I worked with officials from Maryland and Virginia to pass a resolution committing the region to build 320,000 new housing units over the next ten years and will continue to set ambitious goals, both in DC and with our regional partners. I predict that we will need to build at least 40,000 more units in the District between 2025 and 2030 in order to keep up with population growth and address our housing crisis. We specifically have a massive dearth of affordable housing, especially for families, seniors, and people with the lowest incomes. I will set ambitious goals for not just how much housing we build, but how much deeply affordable, multi-bedroom, and transit accessible housing we build. Our current housing production goal only aims for 1/3 of housing to be dedicated affordable. I would go much further.

**Q4**

Where in the District do you think new housing should be built? If you do not think new housing should be built in the District, please write, "I do not think new housing should be built in the District."

We should have two primary goals when determining where to build new housing – moving away from our reliance on cars and creating housing in areas that have fought against denser development and contributed to exclusionary patterns in our city. Our transit centers and major corridors should be the first areas to build new homes. Doing so will also increase support to surrounding small businesses that have lost significant customer bases during the pandemic. We also need to direct more housing growth to areas like upper Northwest and Rock Creek East that have been historically low-density and have high opportunity for new units.

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**Q5**

Please rank the following policies to increase housing production in the order that you would request your administration to pursue them, if elected. If you would not request your staff pursue a policy, please select N/A. (This list is purposefully not inclusive of affordability and stabilization policies, which are addressed in subsequent questions.)

Legalizing two-unit buildings District-wide	<b>4</b>
Legalizing four-unit buildings District-wide	<b>5</b>
Subsidizing individual homeowners to construct ADUs	<b>7</b>
Increasing the percentage of affordable housing required in public-land dispositions	<b>2</b>
Incentivizing the conversion of office buildings to residential properties	<b>3</b>
Eliminating the Height Act	<b>9</b>
Eliminating parking requirements in new construction	<b>6</b>
Amending the building code to reduce construction costs	<b>8</b>
Legalizing and incentivizing housing above public facilities, such as libraries, rec centers, and fire stations	<b>1</b>

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**Q6**

Given the likely marginal effects of converting office buildings to residential on increasing the District’s housing supply (page 3, #1), and given the fact that paying building owners to place affordability covenants on their properties is a preservation, not production, policy, how will you address the District’s housing shortage at a scale that will meet the need of its residents at all income levels?

We need to use every tool we have to increase affordable housing. I will explore innovative ways to use our public land to build more affordable housing. For the past eight years, we have been developing public land in much the same way as we develop private land, without maximizing the number of affordable housing units. I will explore public land trusts, social housing, increasing the amount of by-right density on public sites, and establishing a fund for the District to proactively acquire land.

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**Q7**

I consider affordable housing to be (check all that, in your opinion, apply):

- Means-tested or income-restricted,**
- Subsidized,**
- Rent-controlled,**
- Costing no more than 30 percent of one's household income**

**Q8**

I consider market-rate housing to be (check all that, in your opinion, apply):

- Not means-tested or income-restricted,**
- Built by private developers,**
- Unsubsidized**

**Q9**

How many units of housing do you think should be built in the District by 2030 for households making between:

0-30 percent MFI (\$0- \$27,100 per year for a household of one)?	<b>20,00</b>
30-50 percent MFI (\$27,100-\$45,150 per year for a household of one)?	<b>0</b>
50-80 percent MFI (\$45,150 to \$72,250 per year for a household of one)?	<b>10,00</b>
80-120 percent MFI (\$72,250 to \$108,350 per year for a household of one)?	<b>7,000</b>
	<b>3,000</b>

**Q10**

In response to criticisms that it has failed to meet its targets for building extremely low-income housing (units restricted to residents earning 30 percent AMI or below), the Department of Housing and Community Development has stated, on page 23 of this report, that it cannot do so without coordination and support from other agencies, such as the D.C. Housing Finance Agency and the Department of Human Services. What is the best path forward to ensure extremely low-income housing is reliably produced?

This comes back to a common problem with the Bowser administration; consistent lack of coordination and leadership that has led to poor implementation at the cost of DC residents. This is what happens when we have a Mayor who is more focused on splashy initiatives and headlines than on solving problems. I will focus on government operations to ensure our agencies are working together to deliver results for DC residents. I will create channels of communication so we can find gaps in the delivery of services and fill them. One of the best tools we have for building more units is the Housing Production Trust Fund. Unfortunately, this incredible resource has been misused and underutilized by the Bowser administration. As reported, some projects go to developers with lower-ranking proposals and millions of dollars meant to build deeply affordable housing. As Mayor, I will continue to fund the HPTF at high levels, but I will also ensure the way the money is being used is in the best interest of affordable housing, not giving favors to developer donors.

**Q11**

How will your administration ensure that the District produces housing for residents who make between 50 percent AMI (\$45,150 for a household of one) and 80 percent AMI (\$72,250 for a household of one)?

While I believe we need to focus government investments on providing housing to those at below 50% AMI, it is crucial that we have the housing stock to meet the needs of residents who make between 50 and 80 percent AMI. We need to increase density and examine eliminating onerous zoning regulations (including parking restrictions, especially for units near public transit) that prevent us from building the housing we need. We also need to recognize that many of the working people in this income band are working families and we have a shortage of family sized units. I will explore all our policy tools to maximize the number of family-sized units we are building so working families, including the frontline workers who got us through the pandemic, can afford to work in DC.

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**Q12**

How will your administration ensure the District produces housing for residents who make between 80 percent AMI (\$72,250 for a household of one) and 120 percent AMI (\$108,350)?

As I said in my previous answer, we need to expand our overall housing stock by exploring places for increased density and removing zoning restrictions that limit our ability to build the housing we need. We have to confront the fact that continuous pressure from neighbors in certain neighborhoods has stopped the development of higher density housing we need to meet the needs of our growing population. As Mayor, I will work with neighbors on their concerns so they feel heard and respected, but we will build the housing we need.

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**Q13**

While the District has a robust Housing Production Trust Fund, it is not infinite, and land costs in the District impact the number of affordable units that can be constructed, as well as the percentage of MFI to which they are subsidized. The below scenarios are not inclusive of all options that will ever be on the table. They are, however, representative of the tradeoffs inherent in balancing funding for and the location of publicly subsidized affordable housing, which is often cross-subsidized with market-rate housing. Please choose the scenario you would prefer, and explain why you prefer that scenario.

**One 10-unit project in Forest Hills for residents making under 30 (\$27,100) AMI, and one 40-unit market-rate project in Bellevue**

**Q14**

I prefer this scenario because:

Our most urgent need is housing for residents making under 30% AMI which is where we are seeing underinvestments from the Bowser administration (including mispending over \$80 million meant to help these people). This scenario helps us meet that need while introducing affordable housing into an area of the city where we are lacking affordable units. East of the Anacostia river, we have already met our affordable housing goals but are lacking market rate housing to avoid concentrating poverty. Thus, this scenario best accomplishes the dual goals of building more deeply affordable housing while addressing the disturbing income segregation in our city.

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**Q15**

The Office of Planning's Housing Framework for Equity and Growth, released in October 2019, sets targets for the production of affordable housing per planning area "to achieve an equitable distribution of no less than 15 percent affordable housing in each planning area by 2050." Progress on those targets since January 2019 is illustrated in the above chart, from the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development. What will you do to ensure that every planning area meets its stated target by 2050?

As the chart shows, we are far behind on ensuring affordable housing is allocated evenly throughout our city. We need to explore where there is opportunity to increase density throughout our city, specifically near public transit and address barriers and restrictions preventing us from building the housing we need. I support zoning changes such as addressing restrictions on multi-family units that are necessary in order to open up new housing opportunities. We have to increase density and we can not concentrate it in just specific areas of the city. Without more housing throughout our city, we will continue to see rent and home prices rise. We also need to adjust expectations for community engagement. Community engagement should not be an opportunity for residents to veto plans that are necessary to move us closer to our housing goals. We need to approach community engagement as an opportunity to have tough and honest conversations, not necessarily to end up with agreement, but to demonstrate transparency as to why and how decisions are made and to mitigate concerns as possible without preventing the entire project's success.

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**Q16**

Given widespread support for limited-equity co-ops and community land trusts, what will you do to encourage their proliferation?

We have had a Mayor who has closed the door on creative ideas such as these. As Mayor, not only will I be open to exploring innovative solutions, I will actively encourage it. I will explore adding priorities for these kinds of proposals in HPTF grants/weighting and prioritizing these types of proposals in public land deals.

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**Q17**

The District Opportunity to Purchase Act "gives the mayor the authority to purchase certain apartment buildings in order to maintain existing rental affordable units for tenants and increase the total number of affordable rental units within the District." DOPA is primarily used as a preservation tool: If tenants do not exercise their TOPA rights, the District can make an offer on a building, as long as it "consists of five or more rental units and 25 percent or more of those units are 'affordable' at 50 percent of the median family income." What would you change about this, if anything?

We have underutilized DOPA and my first change would be to utilize this tool more aggressively as it was intended to protect our affordable housing stock. I also believe we need to ensure this tool can be used more expansively which is why co-introduced legislation to remove certain limitations on the authority of the Mayor or the Mayor's assignee to purchase housing accommodations under DOPA.

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**Q18**

Describe your views of the District's inclusionary zoning policy. What do you think it should be achieving? What is it currently failing to do? What, if anything, you think should be changed about it?

Inclusionary zoning is one of the tools we have to create affordable housing and allows us to guarantee new buildings have economic diversity and get more out of market-rate projects. Without taking away from the benefits of IZ, it is clear it is not enough. I will explore ways to strengthen inclusionary zoning to bring about deeper levels of affordability, but the reality is our best tools for creating more deeply affordable housing in the District are elsewhere.

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**Q19**

**Mostly tenant-based**

Housing is publicly subsidized in two main ways: project-based subsidies (such as Housing Production Trust Fund dollars or Low-Income Housing Tax Credits) that are tied to a unit and reduce its cost for any qualified tenants who live there and tenant-based subsidies (i.e., portable vouchers) that a qualified tenant can use on any market-rate unit. Acknowledging that an even split is not realistic, how do you think the District should divide its public subsidy money between these two methods?

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**Q20**

**Yes**

Would you support amending the District’s preservation laws to remove height and mass from the purview of historic review? Under such a proposal, District historic officials would still review materials, aesthetics and compatibility of designated structures, but overall density would be controlled by zoning the same way it is for non-designated structures.

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**Q21**

**Colony Hill**

If District law were amended to allow the designation of historic districts to be removed, which, if any, of the current districts should have its designation removed?

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**Q22**

**Yes**

Should apartments be legal District-wide?

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**Q23**

Where in the District do you think residential density should be increased to accommodate the construction of new housing? If you do not think residential density should be increased in the District, please write, "I do not think density should be increased in the District."

We should have two primary goals when determining where to build new housing – moving away from our reliance on cars and creating housing in areas that have fought against denser development and contributed to exclusionary patterns in our city. Our transit centers and major corridors should be the first areas to build new homes. Doing so will also increase support to surrounding small businesses that have lost significant customer bases during the pandemic. We also need to direct more housing growth to areas like upper Northwest and Rock Creek East that have been historically low-density and have high opportunity for new units.

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**Q24**

**Yes**

The District's current Comprehensive Plan was written in 2006 and amended in 2021. Despite an extensive amendment process, it is still out-of-date, and still restricts density in affluent neighborhoods more than elsewhere. An April 2020 staff report from Office of Planning states that a rewrite of the Comprehensive Plan should be complete by 2025 (page 8). Do you commit to supporting the necessary budget and process for a rewrite of the Comprehensive Plan by 2025?

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**Q25**

**Creating opportunities for new housing**

In a rewrite of the Comprehensive Plan, which of these three options would be your top priority?

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**Q26**

**No**

Traditional smart-growth planning principles concentrate high-density construction, including apartment buildings, on major corridors. This, by design, leaves residential areas off of corridors untouched. Do you agree with this approach to the distribution of housing within neighborhoods?

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**Q27**

Where in the District should production, distribution, and repair zoning should be added so as to more fairly balance it across the District? If you do not think PDR zoning should be added in the District, please write, "I do not think PDR zoning should be added in the District."

We cannot continue to concentrate industrial projects in Black and Brown communities that are already struggling with environmental injustice. We need to distribute these projects throughout the city and prioritize areas that are not already overburdened. We need to do a comprehensive study to determine where these places are and ensure we find an even distribution throughout the city. We should also explore the inclusion of light industrial zoning in mixed-use commercial corridors.

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**Q28**

**Raising the Height Act for buildings that will produce more affordable housing than required by inclusionary zoning**

Given the opportunity, how would you amend the District's Height Act?

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**Q29**

**Too many cars**

Do you think there are not enough cars, enough cars, or too many cars in the District?

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**Q30**

**Yes**

Do you think inducing residents and visitors to drive less should be an explicit policy goal of the District?

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**Q31**

**Yes**

Internal data for WMATA estimates that bus delays cost the system about \$14 million per year. Buses are primarily delayed by sitting in single-occupancy vehicle traffic. Bus riders are more frequently Black and brown, and less affluent, than rail riders and drivers. Would you support removing single-occupancy vehicle parking and travel lanes for dedicated bus lanes, which make bus service faster and more reliable?

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**Q32**

If yes, how will you, as mayor, ensure that DDOT actually repurposes street space to create dedicated bus lanes?

Bus lanes are crucial to the transit equity and environmental goals of our city. People should be able to use the bus to get to work, appointments, or anywhere else in our city and be assured that they will arrive in a timely manner. That is the only way to increase ridership. We need to increase funding to the bus priority program to fully build out the network and build dedicated bus lanes into actual capital projects instead of just quick-build work.

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**Q33**

**Yes**

A 12-year study, published in 2019, found that protected bike lanes drastically lowered fatal crash rates for all road users (in other words, including for people traveling by means other than bicycle) in Seattle (-60.6%), San Francisco (-49.3%), Denver (-40.3%) and Chicago (-38.2%), among others. The Washington Post recently reported that “lower-income neighborhoods in the District recorded eight times more traffic fatalities in recent years than the city’s wealthiest area,” and that the “40 traffic fatalities in the nation’s capital last year were the most since 2007.” Would you, as mayor, support removing single-occupancy vehicle parking and travel lanes for protected bike lanes?

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**Q34**

If yes, how will you, as mayor, ensure that DDOT actually repurposes street space to create protected bike lanes?

Bike lanes are crucial to ensuring we are a multimodal city and protecting the safety of cyclists. I will increase our annual goal of building 10 miles per year and fully build-out the MoveDC priority network as opposed to just leaving it as a plan on a shelf.

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**Q35**

**Yes**

Road pricing, or congestion pricing, in which motorists pay directly for driving on a particular road or in a particular area, has successfully reduced congestion, improved air quality, and raised money in London, Stockholm, and Singapore by reducing the number of vehicles on the road and improving transit performance. New York will be implementing road pricing in the next few years. However, many drivers are loath to pay for something that they currently get for free. Would you implement road pricing in the District?

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**Q36**

If yes, how would you propose re-investing the \$90 to \$500 million in revenue road pricing is estimated to generate for the District? If no, please write, "I do not support road pricing."

We need to invest this revenue into increasing transit equity, especially east of the Anacostia river, so that all residents have access to reliable and affordable alternatives to driving.

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**Q37**

**Yes**

In 2019, the D.C. Council budgeted \$475,000 for the District Department of Transportation and the Deputy Mayor for Operations and Infrastructure to conduct a preliminary study of how road pricing in the District could work. As mayor, will you release the study?

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**Q38**

WMATA is facing a \$375 million budget deficit in FY24, as federal support for transit provided during covid-19 is not likely to be renewed. Though the District, Maryland, and Virginia entered into a regional commitment to fund some of WMATA's capital costs year over year, WMATA's operations do not have a similar dedicated funding stream. Given the need to find local solutions, what will you do to assist in closing WMATA's operational funding gap?

DC already has an outsized role in funding WMATA so I will work with our regional partners to ensure we are getting full commitments from our neighbors. However, at the same time, DC must be ready to contribute what it needs to ensure a reliable, safe, and fast public transit system. I will explore using revenue from road pricing to close this gap. We also need to explore vehicle registration fees and other ways to encourage residents to use metro over driving.

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**Q39**

**Guaranteed headways of 10 minutes or less within D.C.**

Assuming \$500 million could be invested in either fare-free transit for all users or guaranteed headways of 10 minutes or less on bus lines within D.C., which would you prefer?

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**Q40**

Preventing drivers from killing people will require not just incentives for people to drive less and nudges to make them drive better. It will also require policies that actively reshape the District's transportation systems and its landscape to decrease single-occupancy vehicle trips, and to slow down the speed of those trips when people do make them. Please rank the following policies in the order that you would request your administration to pursue them. If you would not request your staff pursue a specific policy, please select N/A.

Implementing a road-pricing program	<b>6</b>
Increasing the cost to own a car in the District, including RPP and parking registration	<b>7</b>
Removing minimum parking requirements in new developments near transit	<b>2</b>
Implementing road diets on arterial streets	
Making some streets, especially residential streets, car-free	<b>3</b>
Regional reciprocity for automated traffic enforcement	<b>4</b>
Building more housing and affordable housing in the District proximate to transit and job centers	<b>5</b> <b>1</b>

**Q41**

Please elaborate further on what you will do to ensure that no one is killed by a driver, especially a driver who has demonstrated their repeated failure to comply with traffic laws.

I will pursue reciprocity with Maryland and Virginia, something the Mayor has failed to execute on despite mandates from the Council.

**Q42**

The District's automated traffic enforcement program cannot meaningfully enforce consequences for unsafe driving upon Maryland and Virginia residents, as the District does not have any reciprocity agreement with those states. As mayor, what will you do to facilitate those agreements, and what will you do to implement them?

As the twice elected Chair of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, I have gained the experience and relationships necessary to facilitate these agreements and ensure they are effectively implemented.

**Q43**

On-street parking occurs in public space, which means that an on-street parking spot cannot belong to a specific individual, and people park in different places at different times. What do you consider a reasonable threshold for evaluating if street parking is sufficient in any given neighborhood?

**A resident is able to find an available public street parking space within one block in any direction of their residence (about a two- to four-minute walk), most of the time**

**Q44**

DDOT's Bus Priority Plan, which will roll out 51 new bus priority lanes over the next several years, is more ambitious than previous transportation programs proposed by the executive. Do you have a greater proposal than this for transportation in the District?

The Bus Priority Plan is a step in the right direction but now we need to see it implemented. The Mayor has released many plans that seem good at first glance but are never implemented fully or are implemented poorly. We need a strong bus priority plan, and we need it implemented effectively. I also will explore adding more fully car-free streets, something other cities are far ahead of us on.

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**Q45**

Understanding that that proposal will garner opposition, just as it will garner support, how will you navigate pushback so as to implement it?

I am committed to building more bus lanes. I believe as a fifth-generation Washingtonian who has spent time talking to people on both sides of the issue, I am uniquely positioned to navigate pushback. I understand why we need to invest in our bus services, but also why some community members will oppose the changes a better bus network will require of our neighborhoods and streets. For a family that has fought hard to own a car and park it outside a home they fought hard to own, the idea of losing parking to prioritize bus service can feel like an erasure of your efforts and a prioritization of new residents over yourself. Navigating this will require someone who is ready to have tough conversations and empathize with residents, but make the transportation infrastructure changes we have to build, like bus lanes, and not allow these discussions to slow or stall projects.

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**Q46**

The District's goal to be carbon-free by 2050 requires most of the reduction of its transportation emissions to come from residents turning existing single-occupancy vehicle trips into transit, walking, and biking trips. Please describe at least one trip you currently take by car (even if you, yourself, are not driving) that you can commit to taking on foot, by bus, by train, or by bike instead.

I would love to be able to bike my daughters to school but unfortunately, I cannot because we do not have a thorough network of protected bike lanes. One of my priorities in office will be to ensure people like me who want to be able to use an alternative to driving but can't because of dangerous road conditions are able to transition from car trips. That will require expanding our network of connected bike lanes, something I have been working on for over a decade and will continue to prioritize as Mayor.

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